DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 518 EA 021 239

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TITLE Integrating and Applying the Successful Components for School Improvement.
PUB DATE Mar 85
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators (Dallas, TX, March 8-11, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Decentralization; Educational Change; *Educational Development; *Educational Improvement; *Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; *Instructional Leadership; *School Effectiveness; Superintendents
IDENTIFIERS *Cedar Rapids Community School District IA

ABSTRACT

The superintendent of Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Community School District discusses school improvement in light of several basic assumptions. The superintendent of schools can be the most influential person in the district. A handful of management techniques or processes can influence teaching and learning. Keeping highly effective schools is an absolute imperative for economic growth and development. Awareness of the "effective schools" movement is also essential. The paper ends with a brief discussion of five key components of school improvement: (1) strategic planning; (2) decentralized management plans; (3) specific curriculum format; (4) maximization of human resources; and (5) support people/teacher cooperation. Appended is the Cedar Rapids Community School District School Improvement Plan. (SI)

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AASA CONVENTION - 1985

(March 8-11, 1985; Dallas, TX)

SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES SESSION II-C
(Friday, March 8, 11:00-12:00 noon)

Integrating and Applying the Successful Components for School Improvement

by
Dr. Harold D. Guthrie, Superintendent
Cedar Rapids Community School District
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

I am happy to have a few minutes to share a successful practice with others who might be interested in embarking on a comprehensive school improvement plan. I am Superintendent of the Cedar Rapids Community School District in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and we are a district of 18,200 students in 21 elementary buildings, 6 junior high schools, 3 senior high schools and one alternative high school. We are proud to represent a district that, as one measure, produces American College Testing scores higher than our States' average, a state that ranks second among the 50 states in overall ACT achievement. We are pleased to have a number of programs featured nationally and our writing project has been adopted by ASCD as a national training model. I make these few comments to assure you that education is alive and well in Iowa and that we are a district from a state that places quality education in high priority. If we have reached this level of success, you may wonder why we are talking about school improvement. There is an easy answer to that question. We live in a world of change. Every indicator suggests that American society is in a period of massive restructuring - our economy, our institutions, our families, our technology. These major changes

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will produce a new way of life, a new set of expectations, and a new list of competencies for the students we send to the marketplace in the year 2000. I strongly contend that public schools in America have served communities extremely well, (American Public Education is a success story.), but I hasten to add that schools must change if we are to continue to adequately prepare students for our rapidly changing lifestyles. These changes in our structure, a flurry of national reports and the continued litany of concerns from parents and employers across the country has opened a "window of opportunity" for leaders of American public schools. This is a time to engineer change and to adjust our delivery systems as we dispense the precious commodity of a free, appropriate, public education for all.

As a Superintendent of Schools in a number of districts in several states, I have decided to approach school leadership armed with several basic assumptions. Let me share four of them with you:

ONE, the Superintendent of Schools can be the most influential person in a district. As the superintendent chooses priorities and sets "tone" and "direction", so goes the staff, most likely (hopefully) the Board of Education and the broader community. I am firmly committed to the central role of the superintendent being that of instructional leader. We have gone through eras where superintendent's were required to assume other priorities and it is all to easy for the superintendent to become embroiled in budgets, transportation, public relations and man other managerial tasks and permit someone else to mind the "instructional store". I challenge all superintendents, regardless of district size, to delegate these

managerial responsibilities, sure, keep a close eye on their progress but devote your personal efforts to leading, directing and monitoring the instructional quality of your schools. The Superintendent should personally exercise every step possible to facilitate excellence in teaching and learning. If you believe this and administer accordingly, your staff and your community will take your instructional commitment seriously and begin to place quality education at the top of the "things to do today" list.

TWO there are a handful of management techniques or processes that have a powerful influence on teaching and learning. We can learn from our friends in the business community about how to benefit from strategic planning, how to establish a management system so that each school building accomplishes the district mission, how to organize programs so that we can measure whether whether students are meeting objectives and how to enhance human resources. We can and should apply highly skilled management techniques to the operation of our schools. In many of our communities we are running the largest corporation, the biggest budget and employ more people than anyone else in town.

THREE, I have already made the point that schools must change if they are to maintain their vital role in strengthening the American economy and our social fabric. In many parts of our Country economic recovery is a major concern. It is well documented that effective, highly productive systems of public education are an economic necessity. Keeping highly effective schools is an absolute imperative for economic growth and development. The quality of our schools is now recognized as vital to economic growth.

FOUR, We are well into the emergence of what is generally referred to as the "effective schools" movement. This movement promises the most fertile opportunity to reform the operation and increase the productivity of school districts and of school buildings across this nation. If you cannot recite the five correlates of effective schools, if you are not aware of the efforts of the Network for Outcomes-Based Schools and that now some private organizations are providing excellent training programs, and are not able to identify where these movements are in place in your schools, then I respectfully suggest that you select some of these topics at this convention. Every school leader should be able to present tangible evidence that the thinking embodied in the correlates of effective schools dominate life in every building of every school district. When I arrived in Cedar Rapids just over two years ago, I came with an excitement that was sparked in several previous districts about school improvement and outcomes-based management. I was able to draw on some experiences from other school districts to put together the school improvement plan that is being distributed to you. We call it "Our Prescription for Growth". With the enthusiastic help of our teaching and administrative staff we identified five key components of school improvement and integrated those five processes into one workable plan. The five components are:

1) Strategic planning. We must identify direction and mission for our schools and make deliberate decisions now to have us where we want to be for the year 2000 and beyond. (The brochure gives more detail.)

2) A decentralized management plan that places responsibility

at the building level for achieving the district direction. The school building should be the focal point of change. We need to manage in a way to allow flexibility in an attendance area but within the parameters of the district mission.

3) Curriculum format should be revised so that we state specific learning objectives that are the district standards for each program, at each grade level, and equally important, develop a method of assessing student achievement. (You do not know what you have accomplished until you are able to state precisely what is expected and assemble data to document where you are in relation to those expectations.)

4) The fourth component of school improvement is how to maximize human resources. A school improvement plan must include a staff development component that enables teachers to improve classroom strategies. Administrators should place a high priority on evaluating classroom performance and student achievement. Where are the students in mastering the stated objectives? (All of these tasks have their basis among the five correlates of effective schools.) In Cedar Rapids we have worked with Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratories (McRel) in Denver, with the Kelwynn organization in Jackson, Mississippi and with Madeline Hunter at UCLA and her mastery teaching program. We have trained over 300 teachers in the mastery teaching project in the last five years and our goal is to train 800 teachers and 50 presenters by

1989. Our principals have all gone through the mastery teaching program and all of our elementary schools have established a cadre of teachers led by their principal to spearhead all improvement activities. All elementary buildings are working in one of three levels of the McRel School Improvement Program. A district is no better than the quality of performance and the vision held by its teachers, principals, central staff and Board. We commit sizable portions of our categorical funds, such as our state improvement monies and our Chapter 2 monies, to the development of people in these approaches to effective schools.

5) Our fifth component of school improvement is to develop an organization where curriculum support people work in close proximity with classroom teachers. Our district is organized into three divisions and a Director of Curriculum oversees the implementation of programs and collects student outcomes data for each division. (You can implement the same philosophy in any size district without divisions, facilitators and all the people we have.) But, you must have written program objectives and someone who has the responsibility to see that the program is implemented and that the results are measured. Also, we have organized all courses into seven curriculum areas, and have placed teaching and administrative representatives from elementary, junior high and senior high levels on each committee. Each committee is led by a teacher who is designated as a "program facilitator", for a one-year term. This mix of people allows tremendous communication about the programs and problems, K-12. Finally, we have an advisory committee for each of

the seven curriculum areas that plugs our community into the schools and enables us to adjust programs based on advice from these committees.

While this may sound somewhat complicated, it is really quite simple. The technical knowledge to do these things is available. There are a number of private and public organizations that are willing to provide the help. The key, I believe, lies with the leadership of the school superintendent. The remainder of the 1980's,and the rest of this century, can be one of the most exciting times that public school educators have ever known. The good news is that we know what to do to have our schools deliver the appropriate program for the 21st Century. The tools, the knowledge,the available training is all there. What we really need is the will to do what has to be done.

(The brochure will give you more details. If you have further questions please call or write.)

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APPENDIX

Cedar Rapids Community School District

School Improvement Plan

"Our Prescription For Growth"

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Components of School Improvement

The Cedar Rapids Community School District has developed a comprehensive planning and improvement process for the purpose of determining skills required by our students in the year 2000, and programs that will help us meet those challenges. Our intent is to establish school improvement activities that will guide the District toward these goals.

The plan is the result of many hours of discussion by concerned groups and individuals:

- the Board of Education
- the Executive Council
- teachers and support staff
- individuals and groups from the community.

Four major conditions for excellence have been identified by this process.

A Future-oriented Curriculum
A Systemized School Improvement Process
A Supportive, Adaptive Environment
Enhanced School and Community Relationships

Key Improvement Priorities for 1984-85

- ensure basic communicative and mathematical competencies
- foster the development of higher-order thinking skills
- develop a growing awareness and understanding of cultural diversity, global interdependence, and world issues
- use student performance (outcomes) data as the basis for decision making
- provide improvement-oriented staff evaluation and development, and
- nurture positive interpersonal relations and the healthful development of self-esteem and wellness.

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMPONENT

The **Building Improvement Plan** is an important component of setting the District's Key Improvement Priorities into action.

Each school in the Cedar Rapids Community School District is responsible for developing an annual improvement plan. The plan must address several of the District's Key Improvement Priorities. The building plan . . .

- is under the management of each building principal.
- reflects the concerns of teachers, students, and parents.
- allows for diversity in each attendance area.
- clearly contributes to District priorities.

Creating the **Building Improvement Plan** is an annual process. Plans for each year are . . .

- drafted in the spring of the previous year.
- presented to the School Board in August.
- reviewed for progress at mid-year.
- evaluated on achievement of results at the end of the year.

The building improvement plan, while reflecting the direction and goals of the Cedar Rapids Community School District, is an expression of the special needs of each school. The strategic plan is the long-range view of the District, and the building plan is the decentralized enactment of that view.

THE BUILDING IMPROVEMENT PLAN COMPONENT

Recent studies of productive schools have indicated that success is more likely if the curriculum is expressed in terms of **learning objectives** which have been identified as most important for students. **Outcomes-based education** has determined several factors which assure effective achievement of those objectives.

1. Objectives are stated clearly and often, so that students understand the expectations of the teacher.
2. Class work reflects the objectives stated for the course.
3. Testing assesses the mastery of the objectives expected for the class. When the student achieves at a prescribed level, the objective has been met.

A characteristic of outcomes-based education requires that every subject area at every grade level base its content on a set of objectives. The writing of objectives offers teachers and administrators the opportunity to review existing programs for on-going validity, revise those that require change, and add or delete content as need dictates.

The second characteristic of outcomes-based education centers on **assessment.** Student progress is measured by achievement of stated course objectives. As objectives are identified, test items are generated that will allow teachers and administrators to monitor student progress by assessing mastery of these objectives.

The information gathered through objective testing allows the Cedar Rapids Community School District to

1. provide a data base for program change.
2. identify staff development needs.
3. evaluate academic program effectiveness.
4. compare the achievement of Cedar Rapids students to students across the nation or across the hall.

Three valuable resources have been provided to teachers and principals to assist them in achievement of District and personal goals.

Effective Schools Research

Studies have shown that effective schools demonstrate certain characteristics that are not so apparent in ineffective schools. Effective schools . . .

- -- hold high expectations for students and teachers.
- -- monitor student progress carefully, report results and use them to improve teaching.
- -- maintain an acadmic emphasis and give students the opportunity to learn expected content.
- -- exhibit an orderly environment and maintain uniform standards for discipline.
- -- possess principals who exhibit strong leadership qualities.

Educational Research Organizations

Several research laboratories and agencies exist in the nation to assist schools in their improvement programs. Staff from such organizations work with schools in Cedar Rapids in a four phase program.

Phase I — **Orientation** — school staff members are introduced to research-based school improvement activities.

Phase II — **Logistical Planning** — staff members develop a formal program for implementing the effective schools research in the building.

Phase III — **School Development** — participants increase their knowledge of effective schools research and its application, master assessment and diagnostic skills, examine and select improvement strategies, and develop a long-term, building-level effective schools plan.

Phase IV — **Follow-up** — agency staff members assist the school in successfully implementing the effective schools plan through follow-up visits and training.

The Mastery Teaching Project

Just as research has established the characteristics of an effective school, research has established the characteristics of effective teachers. **Mastery Teaching** seeks to impart these traits to teachers. Dr. Madeline Hunter, a professor of education at UCLA, is a leading proponent of Mastery Teaching and has worked personally with many Cedar Rapids teachers and administrators. The Mastery Teaching Program provices staff development support which enables teachers. . .

- to analyze learning styles of students.
- to utilize effective teaching theories, such as
  - motivation theory
  - reinforcement theory
  - retention theory, and
  - teaching for transfer.
- to strive for more precise objectives and more effective lesson design.
- to enter into peer support teams and conduct collegial coaching activities.

The District has developed a cadre of presenters who regularly work with other teachers and administrators to present effectively the qualities of a Master Teacher.

In an effort to decentralize curriculum support services, expand staff involvement in curriculum development, and provide leadership opportunities for professional staff members, the Cedar Rapids Community School District adopted the curriculum staff organization described below.

Divisions

The School District has been organized into three divisions for the purpose of curriculum development, support and evaluation.

DIVISION I	DIVISION II	DIVISION III
Washington High	Jefferson High	Kennedy High
Metro Alternative High		
Franklin Middle	Roosevelt Middle	Harding Middle
McKinley Middle	Wilson Middle (K-8)	Taft Middle
Arthur Elementary	Cleveland Elementary	Hiawatha Elementary
Erskine Elementary	Coolidge Elementary	Jackson Elementary
Garfield Elementary	Harrison Elementary	Kenwood Elementary
Grant Wood Elementary	Hoover Elementary	Madison Elementary
Johnson Elementary	Taylor Elementary	Nixon Elementary
Polk Elementary	Truman Elementary	Pierce Elementary
Squaw Creek Elementary	Van Buren Elementary	Wright Elementary
Monroe	(Grant Elementary)	(Noelridge)

Directors of Curriculum

Each division has a Director of Curriculum who works with building principals as a chief resource person for solving building program problems. Directors of Curriculum also assist, when requested, in teacher observation. They supervise curriculum committees and oversee the program facilitators on all matters affecting their division and its programs.

Curriculum Coordinators

Curriculum coordinators have been retained in two areas, the career/vocational cluster, and elementary education/language arts. These individuals provide support services to teachers and principals.

Program Facilitators

Program facilitators, certified members of the teaching staff, are assigned in six curriculum areas. Each facilitator chairs a curriculum committee and is responsible for guiding program development and analyzing student performance data.

Curriculum Committees

A curriculum committee is organized for each of seven curriculum areas. Each committee is composed of representatives of the teaching and administrative staff, K-12. The committee is concerned with recommending the written program in a curriculum area and advising on program adjustments and appropriate inservice through analysis of student performance in the program objectives.

The seven curriculum areas are . . .

1. Language/Communication (English and other)
2. Social Studies
3. Mathematics
4. Science and Technology
5. The Arts (visual and performing)
6. Career/Vocational Studies
7. Personal Development (health, physical education, wellness, family life, and counseling).

Advisory Committees

The District plans to establish an advisory process for each of the seven curriculum committees. Advisors will be community members with the potential of special contribution to each subject area. Parents, employees, business, industry, labor, the military and post-secondary institutions will be represented.

The components described in this brochure constitute a comprehensive school improvement process that is the Cedar Rapids Community School District's definition of what excellence will be and how to achieve it.

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S CABINET

Dr. Newell Lash, Deputy Superintendent
Dr. Richard Schulz, Asst. Superintendent — Educational Services
Dr. Thomas Micek, Executive Director — Elementary Schools
Dr. William Rainbow, Executive Director — Secondary Schools
Dr. Marlin Berg, Executive Director — Personnel
Mr. Gerry Yeggy, Executive Director — Business Services
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Dr. Donald Stout	Dr. Norman Felland	Ms. Ellyn Wrzeski
(Division I)	(Division II)	(Division III)

For additional information concerning the Cedar Rapids Community Schools' School Improvement Plan, contact:

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CEDAR RAPIDS COMMUNITY SCHOOLS